

From: Scott Mitchell, Collections Manager, FLMNH, Member FAC and FAS
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Email to Professional Archaeologists Listserv <flarchaeologists@yahoogroups.com>

Colleagues,

I am posting a letter sent to me from Bob Knight regarding the possible cancellation of the Isolated Finds Program (IFP) by the State (see attachment). His letter presents a good argument for preserving and enhancing the IFP. Bob is an avocational archaeologist that has published in several journals including the Florida Anthropologist.

This is a tough issue. Compromises on both sides of the argument will need to be made.

As a professional archaeologist and museum collections manager, I have serious problems with illicit digging (especially on public lands) and the buying and selling of artifacts which spurs the market - and thus more illicit digging.

However, I also have serious doubts that canceling the IFP is the best solution. While more cooperation is needed on the part of the divers and avocational archaeologists, the state also needs to follow through with making portions of some rivers that contain intact submerged stratified sites off limits to divers collecting artifacts, enforcement of the program, and public outreach.

I want to point out that over 5,000 artifacts (with detailed provenience information) have been reported to the state through the IFP. I also want to stress that there is a distinct difference between responsible avocational archaeologists who share information with professionals and the individuals who engage in illicit digging and never share any data. If we as professionals lump them all together, and the IFP is canceled, then responsible individuals will be alienated and no information will be shared at all.

Finally, remember that many important private collections (often with detailed provenience information) have come into the public domain and are available for study and exhibit purposes. Significant private collections recovered from Florida rivers have been donated to the state and/or museums by the Simpson, Ohmes, Means, and Hendrix families to name just a few. Note that these collections often contain rare items we would never have seen otherwise.

Please support an extension of the Isolated Finds Program so that it can be enhanced and given a second chance. If we stick our heads in the sand and cancel it, the practice of diving for artifacts will continue anyway and we will never see any of the finds or data at all.

This message in no way represents the official views of the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Scott Mitchell
Collections Manager, FLMNH
Member FAC and FAS

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